Roughly five to ten percent of cancers are caused by inherited genetic disorders, but the remaining 90 to 95 percent are caused by exposure to carcinogens (cancer-causing agents such as x-rays or certain chemicals). This is true of breast cancer,[1, pgs.237-241] and of all other cancers as well.

Some carcinogens are natural, such as cosmic rays from outer space, and cannot be avoided. But many carcinogens are synthetic (meaning 'created by humans'), such as fiber glass, x-rays, some pesticides, etc. --and exposure to them COULD be avoided. Thus, cancer is largely a preventable disease. Almost no one disputes this.[1, pgs.55,265]

When women started asking about prevention of breast cancer in the 1980s, they examined the scientific research "establishment" and found it dominated by men who had close ties to industries that produce carcinogens. For example, as recently as the late 1980s, the board of overseers of the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center was comprised of bankers and industrialists. Before Leo Wade became the director of the Sloan-Kettering Center, he had a long career as medical director at Standard Oil of New Jersey.[1,pg.266] and he was a member of the American Petroleum Institute, the National Association of Manufacturers, and the Manufacturing Chemists Association. Under Wade's leadership, Sloan-Kettering never weighed in on the side of prevention.

In 1990 --and for several years before that --the National Cancer Institute's "National Cancer Advisory Panel" (an influential 3-member group with direct access to the President --indeed, it is now called the President's Cancer Panel) was headed by Armand Hammer who was also, at the time, chairman of Occidental Petroleum, a major polluter and manufacturer of carcinogenic chemicals. When Hammer announced a drive to add a billion dollars to the NCT's budget, the goal was "to find a cure for cancer in the next ten years" and none of the money was earmarked for prevention.[1,pg.266]

As we saw last week, Breast Cancer Awareness Month was created in 1987 by a British chemical conglomerate --Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI) --and it is now funded and exclusively controlled by an ICI spin-off, Zeneca Pharmaceuticals.[2] Breast Cancer Awareness Month is focused narrowly on early detection of breast cancer through mammography; it is not about prevention. Zeneca plays a dual role in the cancer business. On the one hand it earns $300 million each year from sales of the carcinogenic herbicide acetochlor,[1,pg.257] while at the same time earning $470 million each year marketing the world's best-selling cancer therapy drug, tamoxifen citrate,[1,pg.255] and it operates a chain of 11 U.S. cancer treatment centers.[3] Clearly, cancer prevention would conflict with Zeneca's business plan.

In the early 1990s, 180 cancer advocacy groups joined together into the National Breast Cancer Coalition (NBCC). Using grass-roots organizing tactics pioneered by AIDS activists and by toxics activists, the NBCC persuaded Congress to increase breast cancer funding by $300 million, [1,pg.255] with an eye toward prevention.

The creation of the NBCC represented a real threat to the chemical industry which has been discharging millions of tons of carcinogenic chemicals into communities for years --all perfectly legal because the industry's friends in Congress have adjusted the laws to make it so.

Grass-roots action to expose the truth about cancer --that CANCER IS A POLITICAL DISEASE --was a real threat to the industry, especially because the message was bubbling up from the grass-roots and being amplified by cancer researchers like Dr. Devra Lee Davis, who was at that time an adviser to the federal Department of Health and Human Services.

If you look for a group of chemicals that is causing more than its fair share of grief, you would probably pick organochlorines. Very few organochlorines exist in nature, and then only in relatively small amounts; the vast majority of organochlorines were created by humans starting around the year 1900 but gearing up big-time after World War II.

Today there are 15,000 different organochlorines but they all tend to have three similar characteristics. First, they tend to persist in the environment (because nature does not break them down readily), so once created they stay around. Second, they are not very soluble in water but they tend to be soluble in fat --so they tend to enter food chains and bioaccumulate as they move upward toward the big predators, like eagles, polar bears, and humans. And third they tend to be toxic in many instances carcinogenic. Recently, it has been shown that several of them interfere with hormones in wildlife --and probably in humans --causing many other problems besides cancer.

Partly in response to the formation of the National Breast Cancer Coalition, the Chlorine Manufacturers Association (CMA) and its subsidiary, the Chlorine Chemistry Council (CCC), hired Mongoven, Biscoe and Duchin (MBD), a PR firm in Washington, D.C., to develop a plan for countereting the "prevention" message.

MBD makes its living by spying on churches, labor unions, environmentalists, and professors and students, writing wildly inaccurate reports about them, then selling the reports to gullible corporate clients, such as CCC. In addition, MBD helps corporate clients develop strategies to resist pressures for change. In its own words, MBD "assists corporations in resolving public policy issues being driven by activist organizations and other members of the public interest community. We help clients anticipate and respond to movements for change in public policy which would affect their interests adversely.... Forces for change often include activist and public interest groups, churches, unions and/or academia.... MBD is committed to the concept that it is critical to know who the current and potential participants are in the public policy process, to understand their goals and modus operandi, and to understand their relative importance. To this end, MBD maintains extensive files on organizations and their leadership...." (See REHW #361.)

A 5-page cover memo to the Chlorine Chemistry Council dated September 7, 1994, and signed by Jack Mongoven, lists many specific steps that CCC should take to defend chlorine and undercut the breast cancer survivors: "It is obvious that the battleground for chlorine will be women's issues--reproductive health and children--and organizations with important constituencies of women opinion leaders should have priority," Mongoven writes. (See REHW #495.)

MBD's August 1994 report to CCC listed a series of conferences for breast cancer survivors scheduled by WEDO (Women's Environment & Development Organization) in New York [phone: 212/973-0325]. The report says, "Devra Lee Davis is expected to direct the Clinton Administration's policy governing breast cancer and we expect her to try to convert the breast cancer issue into a debate over the use of chlorine. As a member of the administration, Davis has unlimited access to the media while her position at the Health and Human Services (HHS) [department] helps validate her 'junk science.' Davis is scheduled to be a keynote speaker at each of the upcoming WEDO breast cancer conferences."

In his cover memo, Jack Mongoven suggests that CCC deal with Dr. Davis, the breast cancer survivors, and anti-chlorine sentiments as follows:

** Schedule through KPR [Ketchum Public Relations, in Washington, D.C.] editorial board meetings in Dayton prior to Department of Health and Human Services Devra Lee Davis'[s] speech to a forum on breast cancer sponsored by Greenpeace and WEDO to be held in Dayton....

** Enlist legitimate scientists in the Dayton area who would be
willing to ask pointed questions at the conference....

** Stimulate peer-reviewed articles for publication in the JAMA [Journal of the American Medical Association] on the role of chlorine chemistry in treating disease.....

** Convince through carefully crafted meetings of industry representatives (in Pharmaceuticals) with organizations devoted to specific illnesses, e.g., arthritis, cystic fibrosis, etc., that the cure for their specific disease may well come through chlorine chemistry and ask them to pass resolutions endorsing chlorine chemistry and communicate those resolutions to medical societies. [End of MBD memo.]

MBD has some influential allies in the campaign to deflect attention away from the fact that cancer is caused 90% to 95% by exposure to carcinogens. For example, NEW YORK TIMES writer Gina Kolata ridicules or ignores anyone who suggests that some portion of breast cancers might be caused by exposure to carcinogenic agents in the environment.


In her review, Kolata forgot to mention that any scientists or physicians appear in the film. Indeed, she gives the strong impression that the women in the film have no scientific basis for their concerns. Kolata writes, "The women [in RACHEL'S DAUGHTERS] are far removed from the universe of scientists and others who make distinctions between hypothesis and evidence, who believe that speculation is not proof, and that when evidence fails to support a hypothesis, the hypothesis should be abandoned." She ridicules the women in RACHEL'S DAUGHTERS, thus: "Are crops sprayed with pesticides? Well, then of course pesticides caused breast cancer. Do we use electricity? Well, of course electromagnetic fields caused breast cancer." In summing up, Kolata dismisses the women's concerns as "paranoid thinking."

What Kolata neglected to mention is that the following scientists and physicians (among others) appeared on-camera in the film, supporting the women's concerns about the causes of breast cancer:

** Ruth Allen, Ph.D., U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and program director of the National Cancer Institute's Long Island Breast Cancer Study Project;

** Devra Lee Davis, Ph.D., World Resources Institute, Washington, D.C., formerly advisor on breast cancer to the federal Department of Health and Human Services;

** John W. Gofman, Ph.D., M.D., professor emeritus of molecular and cell biology, University of California at Berkeley;

** Stefanie S. Jeffrey, chief of breast surgery, Stanford University School of Medicine;

** Donald C. Malins, Ph.D., D.Sc., Pacific Northwest Research Foundation, Seattle, Washington, and member, National Academy of Sciences;

** Marion Moses, M.D., Pesticide Education Center, San Francisco, California;

** Susan Sieber-Fabro, Ph.D., Deputy Director, Division of Cancer Epidemiology and Genetics, National Cancer Institute;

** Shelia Hoar Zahm, Deputy Chief of the Occupational Epidemiology Branch, Division of Cancer Epidemiology, National Cancer Institute.

Happily, if the TIMES should ever dismiss Gina Kolata for writing biased, inaccurate reports, she wouldn't starve. She has demonstrated all the talents needed to hold down a lucrative position with Mongoven, Biscoe, and Duchin.

[Continued next week.]

---Peter Montague (National Writers Union, UAW Local 1981/AFL-CIO)

=====


[4] RACHEL'S DAUGHTERS will be available for screening in your community as of January 1, 1998; to arrange a screening, contact Light- Saraf Films, 264 Arbor Street, San Francisco, CA 94131; telephone and fax: (415) 469-0139.

Descriptor terms: cancer; carcinogens; sloan-kettering cancer center; national cancer institute; nci; robert n. procter; cancer wars; armand hammer; occidental petroleum; standard oil of new jersey; breast cancer awareness month; imperial chemical industries; ici; zeneca pharmaceuticals; tamoxifen; devra lee davis; national breast cancer coalition; chlorine chemistry council; mongoven, biscoe and duchin; mbd; ketchum public relations' kpr; new york times; gina kolata; rachel's daughters; films; breast cancer; estrogens; hormones;